



# *CITY COUNCIL*

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## ***Public Safety Committee***

**Monday, June 1, 2009  
5:00 p.m.**

**Attendance:** D. Sterner, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou

**Other City Staff Attending:** S. Katzenmoyer, R. Hottenstein

Dennis Sterner, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:46 p.m.

### **I. Vacant Property Registration**

Ms. Katzenmoyer stated that after the previous meeting there was confusion about the number and location of vacant properties. She stated that she researched the Great Valley study performed in December 2007 and discovered that at that time there were 245 vacant properties.

Mr. Sterner voiced his belief in the ordinance but stated that the time may not be right to enact it.

Mr. Marmarou agreed, stating that the City was working on other issues at this time. Mr. Hottenstein suggested approaching an outside group to provide renter education; both in regards to college housing and housing in general.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Albright housing issues should be discussed with college administrators now so that they are ready for implementation when students return.

Mr. Sterner suggested that the realtors be approached for the education. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Reading Berks Association of Realtors should be approached.

Mr. Sterner stated that vacant properties pose many safety issues. They also affect neighboring properties. He questioned if the City takes action on these properties when violations are reported. Mr. Hottenstein stated that action is taken.

Mr. Sterner noted that the City must contact property owners with other issues and questioned when owners of vacant properties could be contacted to begin this application process. Mr. Hottenstein stated that this would be another piece of information that would need to be tracked by staff. He also stated there would be enforcement issues. He stated that owners of vacant properties are not good owners.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stressed that vacant properties with violations must be kept from affecting neighbors.

Mr. Sterner questioned if staff reviewed the ordinance. Mr. Hottenstein stated that they had.

Mr. Sterner requested that changes be made now so that the ordinance does not need to be amended once it is passed.

## **II. Disruptive Conduct Ordinance**

Mr. Marmarou stated that this ordinance has already been amended to reduce the number of DCRs from three to two in order to begin the eviction process.

Mr. Sterner stated that Kutztown uses a level one and level two DCR and that this approach appears to be working well.

Ms. Heminitz and Mr. Reinhart joined the meeting. Mr. Marmarou departed.

Mr. Reinhart stated that these quality of life issues will be classified as a DCR when the codes ticketing system is implemented. He stated that the system will be operational August 1. He stated that Allentown also classifies quality of life issues as DCRs.

Mr. Mayes joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Sterner again noted the level one and level two DCRs used by Kutztown. Mr. Reinhart suggested meeting with the President Judge to discuss this method as the MDJs would need to uphold it.

NOTE: MDJs only hear appeals to citations. The DCR Board hears eviction appeals. Decisions of the DCR Board may be appealed to the Court of Common Pleas.

Mr. Sterner and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the proposed changes be sent to the President Judge.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this ordinance would need to be amended to implement the ticketing system. Mr. Reinhart indicated that this would be an entirely new ordinance.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that requiring Albright students to return to living on campus may be legally problematic. She suggested that this proposal be discussed with all area colleges and universities. Mr. Hottenstein agreed.

Mr. Reinhart stated that Codes is looking forward to implementing the ticketing system on August 1.

### **III. Update – Implementation of Recommendations from J. Kromer/E. Weiss**

Mr. Reinhart stated that codes inspections are still outside the seven year window. He stated that it is his hope to get within the seven year window before implementing all of the recommendations. He stated that a systematic approach will be used.

Mr. Sterner questioned what the window currently is. Mr. Reinhart stated that it was nine years.

Mr. Sterner questioned the improvements made since Council added resources to the Codes office. Mr. Reinhart stated that by August 1 they will be inside the seven year window. He stated that he is currently studying implementing the recommendations by MDJ district or by voting wards and precincts. He stated that an external inspection will be done of each property and housing issues will be researched.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if there was quality sharing of information between departments. Mr. Reinhart complemented Ms. Katzenmoyer for her work on locating possible rental properties. He stated that this information is being merged into their research. He stated that it is his hope that problem properties and areas be addressed as priorities.

Mr. Kanezo joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Reinhart noted that properties are continuing to be placarded as necessary.

Mr. Sterner questioned if owners are being cited for not having a local property manager. Mr. Reinhart stated that permits are not being issued to properties not having a property manager.

Mr. Reinhart stated that codes records are becoming much more complete and accurate through this process.

Mr. Sterner questioned if all the information collected is being entered into the Hansen system. Mr. Reinhart stated that it is and that a paper copy is also being kept updated as a backup.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the City's computers are backed up regularly. Mr. Hottenstein stated that they are backed up daily and that files are kept in two locations; City Hall and the Public Works building.

Mr. Reinhart stated that Council will be receiving updates monthly.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the Administration had reviewed the spreadsheet prepared by Council. Mr. Hottenstein stated that they had and the monthly reports will be based on the information requested by Council.

#### **IV. Update - Zoning Housing Permit Process**

Mr. Hottenstein stated that the updates to Council will include codes and zoning information.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that the process is becoming more organized. She stated that it will be good to have comparable and accurate information to track the process.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this information should then be used to track a correlation between housing issues and crime issues. Mr. Hottenstein added that problem property owners could also be tracked.

Mr. Sterner stated his belief that the overall process has gotten smoother. Mr. Mayes agreed and stated that much work has been done by his department over the last six months. He stated that the process was documented and a standard operating procedure adopted. He also noted better communication and cooperation between codes and zoning.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the role of Steve Price, Solicitor to the Zoning Hearing Board, was discussed. Mr. Mayes stated that he serves as the AHO in the process. He also stated that Ms. Oehler is currently processing 70 applications. He stated that the first joint report given to Council will be important as all the information will be timely.

#### **V. Other Business**

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested that the amended graffiti ordinance be discussed at the next meeting. She stated that graffiti is becoming the norm in many neighborhoods. She would like to know how the amendments have affected prevention and adjudication. Ms. Hemnitz stated that to date 18 arrests have been made and four more are pending.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has had an opinion from an attorney that neighbors can attend juvenile hearings and testify as victims.

Mr. Sterner noted the need for these perpetrators to see the repercussions of their actions. Mr. Reinhart stated that if more than \$5,000 in damage is caused, it can be prosecuted as a felony.

The Public Safety Committee meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by  
Shelly Katzenmoyer, Deputy City Clerk*

Issues for Follow-Up:

- Legal brief on abandoned property legislation in Pennsylvania
- List of tenants and landlords receiving DCRs
- List of property owners without rental permits
- Enforcement of 800 foot rule for student rentals
- Codes ticketing system
- Review Vacant Property Registration Ordinance
- Graffiti Enforcement